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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4912  
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA IMMEDIATE 0005  
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM IMMEDIATE 0307  
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM IMMEDIATE 0154  
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI IMMEDIATE 1226  
RUEHNJ/AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA IMMEDIATE 1128  
RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY PRIORITY  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHAE/AMEMBASSY ASMARA PRIORITY 0357  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1144

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000578

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/13/2017

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SUBJECT: FRANCE/AFRICA: SUMMIT NO-SHOWS AND MUGABE; MFA AMBIVALENCE ON AMISOM

REF: A. PARIS 486 B. STATE 14111 C. STATE 17083

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah B. Rosenblatt.  
Reasons 1.4b,d

¶1. (C) Summary: There is MFA speculation that Zimbabwean leader Mugabe, angry at his own exclusion, has tried, with mixed results, to promote a SADC boycott of the 2/15-2/16 Africa-France Summit in Cannes. On Darfur, MFA is resisting a campaign by Khartoum for French mediation between Deby and Bashir. President Chirac must decide whether to limit his engagement at the Summit to bilateral interventions or whether to host a sidebar mini-summit with Bashir, Deby and Bozize, and possibly others. On Somalia, MFA indicated France would explore support and training for an AMISOM contingent from Burundi.  
End Summary.

¶2. (C) MFA AF DAS-Equivalent for East Africa Helene Le Gal told Africa Watcher on February 12 that Tanzanian President Kikwete had decided against attending the Africa-France Summit in Cannes. Kikwete may have been subjected to pressure within SADC to boycott the Summit after the French refusal to invite President Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Le Gal speculated. South African President Mbeki's non-participation was likely unrelated, if convenient within the context of informal SADC pressures over Mugabe. (Comment: Chirac won no points with South Africa with his 2005 suggestion that Mbeki did not understand the psychology of West Africans.) Le Gal was thankful that the President of Namibia would attend the France-Africa Summit, effectively thwarting any attempt at an informal SADC boycott.

¶3. (C) Evincing disappointment that turn-out at the Summit might not equal previous rosy forecasts, Le Gal admitted France may be paying a price -- in the short term -- for barring Mugabe from Cannes. It was nonetheless the right decision, she insisted, satisfied that France, in a marked change from the 2003 France-Africa Summit, had not sought an exemption to the EU travel ban on the grounds of advancing dialogue. France couldn't play that card twice, Le Gal said, especially since there had been no headway on Zimbabwe in the interim. Separately, AF DAS-Equivalent for West and Central Africa Francis Blondet confirmed the decision to exclude Mugabe had been controversial within the MFA.

¶4. (SBU) Other prominent absentees at Cannes would include Ghadaffi, who always avoids the France-Africa Summit, Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki, Rwandan President Kagame, Kenyan President Kibaki, and DRC President Kabila. Le Gal found Kabila's failure to show especially puzzling. Blondet confirmed the absence of Ivoirian President Gbagbo.

What to do about Sudan?

15. (C) Asked about reports of a mini-summit on Darfur on the margins of the Cannes Summit, Le Gal stated that nothing had been decided. France was resisting a push from Khartoum to mediate between Deby and Bashir, she said, adding that Khartoum lay behind leaks to the media of a possible mini-summit. Chirac may very well host a sidebar with Bashir, Deby and Bozize, yet Le Gal dismissed press reports that the French President had an agenda to push for deployment of UN forces. Le Gal similarly dismissed the rumor that Chirac and Mubarak planned to co-chair a mini-summit on Darfur. A larger gathering was an option, of course, but the format could be a challenge and Le Gal revealed a certain reticence about taking that approach in the absence of key players on Darfur, e.g. Libya and Eritrea. Chirac would of course be engaging at the bilateral level, Le Gal indicated.

Eritrean Efforts on Sudan: Give Peace a Chance?

16. (C) Africa Watcher raised MFA A/S-Equivalent Gliniasty's February 1 comments regarding Eritrean efforts on Darfur, notably how Eritrea had sought feedback from France on U.S. views of Eritrean peace initiatives (Ref A). Le Gal confirmed that French Presidential Sudan Envoy Herve de Coignac saw potential benefits in the Eritrean efforts; UN Envoy Eliasson also did not appear averse, she said. Le Gal herself was strongly skeptical about Eritrean prospects for success. That said it was best to let Eritrean efforts take their course and not interfere at this point with Eritrean plans to organize peace talks in Tripoli end-February. Africa Watcher noted the contradictions in boosting Eritrean initiatives on Sudan even as Eritrea fueled Islamist violence in Somalia.

17. (C) Turning to the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, Africa Watcher briefed Le Gal on U.S. thinking on the way forward (Ref

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B). Le Gal said France would continue to defer largely to U.S. views on how to address the problem. Le Gal noted that Ethiopian PM Meles would attend the Africa-France Summit.

Somalia: French Ambivalence

18. (C) Somalia TFG PM Ghedi is expected at the Africa-France Summit, but there are no arrangements for bilats with President Chirac or FM Douste-Blazy, Le Gal said. She anticipated A/S-Equivalent Gliniasty would see Ghedi in the course of the summit. She volunteered that Ghedi represented a stumbling block to dialogue and reconciliation in Somalia.

Somalia: Wary Support For AMISOM; MFA Divisions on PKO Transition

19. (C) Africa Watcher presented demarche points seeking broad support for AMISOM deployment (Ref A). Le Gal stated the MFA was leery of financing AU operations after the unsatisfactory situation with AMIS in Darfur. France however would look to train, equip and transport troops from Burundi, though the French Embassy in Bujumbura was only now initiating consultations on the possibility. Le Gal inquired how Ugandan troops would deploy into Somalia. Would the U.S. provide air transport or rely on contractors? More to the point, how could we guarantee airport security in Mogadishu? Ethiopian efforts were evidently not sufficient, she commented.

110. (C) Despite her aside about AU deficiencies in Darfur, Le Gal admitted that an AMISOM operation could have a substantial impact within Somalia. She preferred a mission limited in scope and focused on Mogadishu. She lauded the draft UK resolution under discussion at the UNSC. Within the MFA, the African Affairs Directorate looked favorably on an eventual transition to a UN PKO; however, the United Nations Directorate (IO-Equivalent) adamantly opposed a UN operation, arguing that there were currently too many UN peacekeeping operations to handle (and fund) properly.

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